

Letter by Councilmember Nancy Dacek following up on the
Community Meeting about Problems at the First Home Care Group
Home in Germantown...

January 11, 2001

Suzanne Puryear
Administrator
First Home Care Corporation
825 Crawford Parkway
Portsmouth, VA 23704

Dear Mrs. Puryear:

Thank you for attending last night's meeting. I appreciate your traveling a long distance to attend. Having a public forum was a very important first step, but as you are likely aware there is a long way to go before actual healing can begin in the community.

I was surprised to learn of many additional issues and incidents that surfaced in last night's meeting. Because of this, I am more deeply troubled and concerned about whether or not the faith and trust of the community can be repaired without severe and very swift action by the State and especially by First Home Care Corporation (FHCC). In an effort to begin the process of restitution and healing I strongly encourage the following actions:

FHCC should send a strong letter of apology to the community for the damage that was caused by residents of the home. Additionally, the letter should outline actions taken by FHCC and what additional actions are planned.

FHCC's insurance claims representative should have a presence in the community as soon as possible and the community should be held harmless from all damage caused by the residents of Crossroads House. The community should not have to make claims directly to their insurance companies or pay any deductibles. I will be happy to help arrange for use of community space in the Germantown for the insurance representative to meet with members of the community.

I understand that the State has recently given FHCC a deadline of January 22 to install alarms on windows in the home, however, these should be installed within 48 hours. The residents of the community and I were under the impression that this corrective

action had been taken weeks ago and were very surprised to find out last night that this had not been completed.

In light of new issues and information presented in last night's meeting, FHCC should re-open the investigation of the operation of the group home. Corrective action should include strong consideration for replacing staff at the home as well as criminal background checks for current and future employees. Backgrounds of employees or the residents of the home aside, it is hard to believe that even one youth could have been out, unsupervised for so many nights in a row. The community needs to be assured in some proactive manner that management of the home will be raised to a level of superiority and accountability.

A re-evaluation should be made of the criteria used to determine who is placed in this home and criteria for termination from the program. The recent series of vandalism and thefts connected with one of the residents of the home illustrate that at least one youth was placed there who was not ready for such an environment.

I still believe that we should not judge all residents of Crossroads based on the actions of two individuals who made some very poor choices. At the same time, I am committed to doing all that I can to make sure that the community is protected from any other dangerous incidents that might result from mismanagement or improper placement of residents in the facility.

Though I have never witnessed a conflict between a group home and its community as I have here in Germantown with the Crossroads House, I have witnessed other communities and group homes successfully overcome very serious problems. It required extensive outreach, communication, coordination, working together, and time. Though the task in this case is a daunting one, I am still hopeful that somehow restitution can be made and that trust can be rebuilt between this community and Crossroads. I look forward to continuing work with the community, FHCC and the State to find solutions to this conflict. Thank you for assistance.

Sincerely,

Nancy Dacek
Councilmember